ASIAN-CANADIAN STUFF FOR THE REST OF US
ISSUE THREE – FALL 2003

what i did on my summer vacation

banoodle

bambooda

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ON THE COVER: *PARKING LOT*

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SPECIAL THANKS
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SHOUT OUTS
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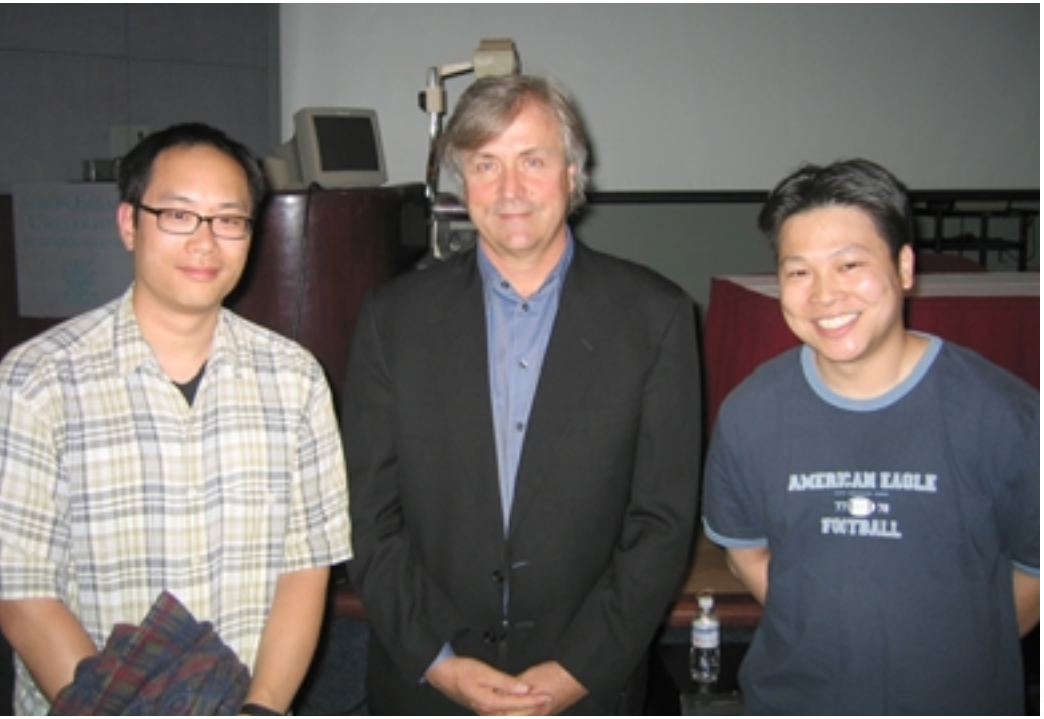
Founder's Message

Summertime and the living was easy . . . too easy for some of us anyway, as the prospect of putting out another issue of *bambooda* in the autumn seemed like a distant island in a sea of tranquillity. Too soon came September, and with it, work (yes, oddly, all of us at *bambooda* have day jobs), school and a million distractions that led to this issue being a bit later than we had anticipated. But here it is — and I wish I could take more credit for it but the truth is, more than in any previous issue, the editorial was a team effort with bulk of the work being done by my partner-in-crime, Dennis Chui. While I still have the microphone, I would also like to thank Marlene Dong for her editorial advice and assistance at the crunch, as well as Terry Chan and Christine Miguel for being good friends and continually pestering me via e-mail and phone calls about getting this done. So now the summer's over; but as the days grow shorter and the sleeves and pants grow longer, we thought we would take a look back at what we did during those lazy months when we should have been producing this issue.

Kuan

bambooda meets Salon:
Salon.com Founding Editor David Talbot with Kuan and Dennis at SFU Harbor Centre



MARLENE DONG

Another Founder's Message

Hi guys, it's been a while, but we finally got this issue out the door! We've ditched the page numbers. We don't think you'll miss them. Eat more fish!

Dennis

what i did on my summer vacation

travelling [brazil] [victoria's chinatown] [powell street festival]

listening [round_ruckus]

watching [leon aureus: fu-gen asian-canadian theatre company]

eating [restaurant reviews] [yummy product of the month]

spending [sophia books] [100 yen store] [richmond night market]

geeking [cheapo cd sleeve] [i enjoy being a nerd] [weblogging]

stuff [holy matrimony!] [chinese school]

travelling

fly me to brazil

words & photos by alex joo

DAY 1:
SAO PAULO AIRPORT

FORTALEZA

BEACH IN SALVADOR

STREET IN SALVADOR

DAY 1 – SAO PAULO AIRPORT: 9:00AM

Stepped out of the airport and it was as cold as fucking Toronto. Hobbled over to the Varig Airlines counter where we purchased tickets to fly as close to the equator as possible. Four hours later and we're sweltering in mid-40C degree weather in a shoddy Fortaleza airport where, to my astonishment, nobody knew the word "washroom" in English, nor could they decipher my taking-a-piss charade.

DAY 2 – FORTALEZA: 6:34PM

Got me some hot Brazillian kissing action last night! Man, was that easy! Out-of-Toronto-Alex is a fucking rock star, in stark comparison to Toronto Alex who just likes to take his pants off for no good god reason. Bad breath and couldn't speak English, but I'm not picky on vacation. She wrote her email address on a napkin and almost cried, I think.

DAY 3 – SALVADOR: 1:23PM

On a beach in Salvador, lying back with a cigarette dangling in-between my fingers and Aimee Mann on the MD. Blue water, salty air, waves crashing, chest sweating — fuck it all, this is living.

DAY 4 – SALVADOR: 5:00PM

Man, beggars galore up in Pelhourino, Salvador. 12-year old junkies scared the shit out of me, clinging to my shirt for two blocks as I made my way from the hotel to the restaurant. Word is that they ask tourists to buy them milk only to barter them for drugs when you're out of sight. During dinner, he watched me and my travelling companion Christine eating, fucking cackling his toothy, evil cackle, waiting for us to leave so he could harass me once more. Sleep tonight will be uneasy and riddled with nightmares of 12-year olds prodding my ass with a very big stick — but in a bad way.

HOOKER

SALVADOR

STREET PARTY

When I'm on a trip all's I need is a beer, a pack of cigarettes and strange people to meet.

DAY 5 – SALVADOR: 3:30PM

I'm sitting on a dirty concrete slab outside yet another marketplace hawking cheap goods, waiting for Christine to finally emerge; a huge impairment of traveling with a female friend. When I'm on a trip all's I need is a beer, a pack of cigarettes and strange people to meet.

DAY 6 – SALVADOR: 12:42PM

Woke up with a raging hangover, from a street party held last night.

"Hey, see that hot girl that I kissed?"

"What're you talking about, she was fucking ugly. And I'm pretty sure she was a hooker."

DAY 7 – SALVADOR BUS STATION: 10:12PM

Last night I found her again. We danced in-between cheap patio furniture laid out on the cobblestone streets, ignoring the rest of the world by submersing ourselves in our own of grazing lips and bumping hips. Found out she was indeed a hooker, and hopped up on cocaine — the choice drug of Salvadoreans. Rinsed my mouth out with whiskey and cheap cigarettes as she swore at me.

Mannequins here have nipples the size of fucking doorknobs. If they're a reasonable facsimile of your garden-variety Brazillian...man, I should've signed up for health insurance. Those things wouldn't just poke my eye out — they'd suplex me from the top ropes and finish me off with a leg-drop and a few pen jabs to the abdomen.

PORTO SEGURA

BUS TRIP

RIO DE JANEIRO

I want to rub my naked crotch on every tree stump, every stone, every hot woman that walks by.

DAY 10 – PORTO SEGURA: 3:26PM

Sitting on the balcony of my $20CDN/night resort hotel room. I thought I'd be moping the nonexistence of a girlfriend on this trip, but I'm pretty fucking whole with what's on this here table in front of me: Skol beer; Free cigarettes (light); India.arie, Mazzy Star, Rob Thomas on the headphones; notebook and pen; Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* (re-reading for the umpteenth time); beaches and motherfucking palm trees.

20 Minutes Later...

Change my mind. The table in front of me is clearly meant for two and it'd be fucking gold if there was someone sitting there drinking coffee with a newspaper as I sit here with my beer and notebook. Some beautiful sun-baked woman with sand in her hair, bikini under her tank, sandal dangling from her toe and love in her eyes.

DAY 11 – ON THE BUS FROM PORTO SEGURA TO RIO DE JANEIRO: 3:00AM

All I've been ingesting on this trip are cheeseburgers and beer. From the looks of my pudge, my plan to wear a thong on the beaches of Rio is now lost. How quickly the wind changes direction.

DAY 13 - RIO DE JANEIRO: 5:34PM

Bus ride to Rio from Porto Segura was pure fucking hell — kids running around, shit-stink emanating from the washroom, even a woman changing her goddamn kid's diaper in the seat next to mine. If the ride had been just 10 minutes longer, my previous day's meal of two cheeseburgers would've been all over the fucking aisle.

The Copacabana/Ipanema area is truly breathtaking. I want to rub my naked crotch on every tree stump, every stone, every hot woman that walks by.

RIO AT NIGHT

SHITTY MOTEL

DAY 15 – RIO DE JANEIRO: 4:38PM

I cannot believe how many hookers there are in Rio. Every local I talk to after the sun goes down ends up offering me sex within ten minutes of conversation. And they aren't all hookers — you can tell — but some are pimped out by their friend next to them trying to capitalize on my interest.

I've stopped talking to all locals two days ago. Shit's just wrong.

DAY 16 – SAO PAULO: 3:31AM

The plane we were supposed to take left three hours ago, leaving us "standby" passengers at a shitty motel. There were some 40-some odd seats left, but extra cargo weighed the plane to its maximum capacity. No choice but to make the best of one more night unexpected night in Brazil.

Drinking a supermarket-bought Miller Genuine Draft for 40 Canadian cents in a highball motel glass with ice while sitting on a creaking bed and watching *Ally McBeal* with Portuguese subtitles. Writing in my notebook with a headache from eating two bags of oily Ruffles for dinner and missing my dog.

ALEX JOO is now safely back in Toronto.

THE OLDEST CHINATOWN IN CANADA

By Dennis Chui

The oldest Chinatown in Canada is a block long. Seriously. Located in the heart of Victoria, BC, the nation's first Chinatown is now just a fancy gate and a handful of stores and restaurants.

However, after you've finished feeling pissed-off, there's actually a neat kitschy quality to it all. Maybe it's the inauthentic "Chinese and Western food" restaurants, or the infamous "Fan Tan Alley." My Dad says that "fan tan" is a kind of gambling. How seedy! But not to worry, cuz nowadays the alley is so clean and sparkling and devoid of Asian content, that people like you and me can walk down this famous alley and not feel at home. The lack of pee smell in a Chinatown alley was simply incredible.

DENNIS CHUI is the art director of *bambooda*.

Clockwise from left: strolling down the infamous Fan Tan Alley; the gate to Victoria's Chinatown; one of a handful "Chinese" restaurants; the best vegetables for sale; you might miss the alley completely if it wasn't for the sign.

Top row: traditional Japanese storyteller; Number One Son; Seattle's Aiko Shimada. Bottom row: breakdancing competition; Vancouver's Katari Taiko; sumo competition

THE 2003 POWELL STREET FESTIVAL

By Kuan Foo Photos by Dennis Chui and Kuan Foo

The first Powell Street Festival was held in 1977, mounted by a handful of volunteers. The location was Oppenheimer Park, between Powell and Cordova Street, the centre of the Vancouver's Japanese-Canadian community in the days before the Second World War. As such, the festival has always been a symbol of homecoming: for the community that was scattered by the government-imposed internment and post-war dispersal and for Japanese-Canadians and other Asian-Canadians looking for a place to celebrate their uniquely hybrid culture and identity.

The festival is still going strong. Now Canada's largest Japanese-Canadian celebration, Powell Street is a community event in the truest sense of the word. You won't find any major corporate sponsors or watered-down government multiculturalism here. Instead, you are treated to two days of traditional and contemporary Japanese-Canadian arts and culture including music, dance, literature, food and martial arts. Some of it may be old and familiar, some new and challenging, but all of it is real. All of it is home.

KUAN FOO has participated in the Powell Street festival, both as a volunteer and as a performer with his band, Number One Son, for the past 10 years.

listening

Causing a Ruckus

Grooving to the humourous hip hop stylings of Otto Wong AKA round_ruckus.

by Winona Tong photos by Rannie Turingan

Neither completely yellow nor completely white, *Jook-sing* have always struggled with their identities. Eventually they come to realize that their culture is a fusion of the best of both worlds, but why must they struggle at all? It wasn't until recently that *Jook-sing* icons emerged to assure them that they are not alone. Otto Wong AKA round_ruckus is one such icon.

In February 2003, round_ruckus created a buzz amongst CBCs on the Internet with his Chinese covers of popular Hip-Hop and R&B tunes. His tongue-in-cheek translations of P. Diddy, B2K and the Backstreet Boys' greatest hits may have left most listeners scratching their heads, but CBCs and the like finally found something that they could call their own.

***bambooda* had the opportunity to chat with round_ruckus to find out more about the man behind the music.** >>

What is your educational background?

I went to U of T, St. George Campus. I was at St. Michael's College. I graduated in June of 2002 with a double major in computer science and philosophy.

What is your musical background?

I've done my grade eight [piano] exam and I got 60% on it or something [laughs] — not a very high score. I took clarinet in high school for five years. When I was in grade eight I taught myself how to play the guitar. I've been doing vocals ever since I was born. I'm enrolled in the Toronto School of music for vocals for the last year or so. I'm learning how to sing opera.

Like, Chinese opera?

No, I wouldn't touch Chinese Opera with a yardstick. It's Western Opera.

How did you get started in hip hop, particularly Chinese hip hop?

I've always been listening to hip hop but I never thought a Chinese guy could do it. I thought it was a Black people thing and we're just there to hear it [laughs]. Then in third year [university], I met a Chinese guy named Jay. He's an amateur musician himself. He does a lot of rap and writes his own beats and lyrics. He showed me that it was possible for Chinese people to do rap.

Back then, Jackie Chan was making movies with Chris Tucker, DMX and Jet Li. All these homie guys were wearing gold medallions with Chinese letters on them. Allen Iverson got [a Chinese tattoo that says] "Loyalty" on his neck.

So I said to Jay, "Jay, it's time for a Chinese rapper. I think me and you should hook up and do something." But we were in school at the time, studying all the time, so there was not really a lot of time to do anything.

Who are your heroes, inspirations and people you look up to?

In terms of hip-hop and rap, definitely Tupac [Shakur] and Eminem. Tupac inspired me in the sense that his voice and his lyrics were good, but because his life was so hardcore, it's very hard for someone like me to relate to his lyrics. But before I record, or perform, I always listen to 20 minutes of Tupac. Eminem taught me how to flow. Dr. Dre is also a huge influence.

Other musical influences I have are The Nylons, a Canadian a cappella group; The Real Group, a Swedish a cappella group; Frank Sinatra; Bobby Darin — all the old guys. I really dig a cappella and jazz. I used to do a lot of that before I did hip hop.

How about Asian-Canadian or Asian-American artists?

Masia One — she's great. I've spoken with her a few times, actually. Her stuff is amazing. She's really cool to watch in person, in a real, live show. There's Jin the Emcee and Epidemic. But these are a different type of inspiration. They aren't the type of inspiration that you try to study to make yourself better. They're more like encouragement.

Then there's my cousin, Plow. He helps me a lot with Chinese lyrics because my level of Chinese [knowledge] is not that great. He's a big inspiration.

Where did the name "round_ruckus" come from?

I wanted to come up with a rapper name for myself and Eminem was a big inspiration for me at that time. He's called "Slim Shady" so I came up with something along the same rhythm, which has the same type of connotation. That is how I came up with "round_ruckus." The way I saw it, I was a chubby kid that made a lot of noise, where as Slim Shady's a skinny guy who's shady.

What are you trying to achieve or where do you hope to go with your music?

Where do I hope to go? I hope to sell platinum albums! [Laughs.]

I would love to be a professional musician, but if this hip-hop thing as an artist doesn't work out, I'd like to open up a recording studio specifically geared towards amateur artists. Now that I'm getting into microphones and equipment, I think it's possible to make yourself sound pretty good without the most expensive equipment. I have a vision, that one day I would have my own record label that will release CDs for amateur artists called 5354. I'd be like a Chinese P. Diddy. That would be awesome.

I had a discussion with my cousin, Plow. If we both made it big, would we move to Hong Kong? He says yes, and I'm like, no way man, I'm staying here. If anything, I'm moving to California where the weather's nice, but I'll have a home up here for sure. I'm Toronto for life. Go Raptors, go! I'm the biggest Raptors fan.

So, you're going to leave Computer Science behind?

Oh no, that's gone, man. I graduated last June, and the market's bad. It took me about 3 months to find a job. I worked for 6 months, and realized I hated it [laughs]. Just hated it. I don't want to touch the IT field ever again. I want to do music for the rest of my life.

But by the same token, if you ask me if I think going to school for Computer Science was a waste of time for four years, I wouldn't say that at all because a lot of what I rap about comes from the experiences I've had in life. I see it as a life experience.

I acknowledge the fact that if I did four years of music school, I might be a much better musician these days, but it's all a learning process. It'd be different experiences as well. Like for example, I met Jay through CS. If I didn't meet him, I might not be doing hip hop at all.

What inspired you to do Chinese hip hop?

When I went to grade school and high school, I was surrounded by Italian people, so I thought

I was White for the longest time. You see everybody around you, you know you look different, but whatever.

When I got into U of T, there were a million chinks all over the place. All of a sudden, I wanted to be Chinese, and started hanging around more of these mainland and HK, FOBs. I struggled around with my identity for a bit and then in the end I figured, "Hey, I don't have to be labelled anything." If anything, I'm labelled a *Jook-sing*. I'm Chinese-Canadian. That's what I am.

That is something I came to realize just growing up. I think a lot of Jook-sing go through a stage in their life where they think they're White, or Black if they hang out with a lot of Black

when she heard my music, it was so simple and ridiculously stupid, she understood it all...

people, and then they meet a bunch of Chinese people and try to identify with them somehow. I think there are a lot of Jook-sing struggling with their identity, trying to figure out who they are.

The music itself doesn't have that as the content, but it's implied through the language that's being used. Sometimes when I'm speaking with my friends, I'll be speaking in English and all of a sudden, I say a line in Chinese and go back to English. Sometimes there are certain things you can only say in Chinese. It just doesn't sound right in English or you don't know how to say it in English.

My music is supposed to be geared towards Jook-sing in the sense that the Chinese isn't very difficult to understand. It's actually very easy to understand because it came from my brain [laughs]. A lot of it is translated directly from English to Chinese. It doesn't make sense to a guy from Hong Kong, but a Jook-sing will pick it up really fast just because they [think in the same way.] Jook-sing culture already exists, but it's not yet accepted. I'm trying to make it more accepted as a culture.

I had this "super fan" contest going on. I corresponded with Kat, the girl who won, over e-mail. She said something interesting that I didn't realize I was doing at the time. Basically, she's ABC — American Born Chinese. She found my music refreshing to listen to because she had given up speaking in Chinese with her parents, long ago. Even when she watches Chinese programs on TV, she doesn't really "get" half of it because they speak so formally. But when she heard my music, it was so simple and ridiculously stupid, she understood it all. She said it gave her a feeling that she was still Chinese. It made her feel like there are people that she can identify with.

When Kat told me that, I was honoured, because I never saw myself as an icon for Jook-sing. It's pretty cool to become an icon for Jook-sing so that they have something that they can call their own. It's very inspiring to be able to do something like that.

What was your reaction to how others received your music?

It was flattering. My [web] site exploded in a matter of a week and a half and within that week and a half, I got 15,000 hits. It was pretty cool. One morning I check how many hits I have, the next morning I have 2000 more. It's died down a bit [since then.] I haven't really put anything new on there recently because I've been working on my album.

Are you trying to move away from being known as "the guy who does funny covers" and achieve recognition as an artist in your own right?

Well, I'll always continue doing the funny covers, just for fun and I'll put them all up for free. But for sure, I'm going to be more than just the funny guy who does covers. I'm not trying to move away from it, but I'm trying to expand on who I am.

What is your take on the MP3 and file sharing issue?

The times are changing. Once, I got separated with some buddies at a mall and called them to find out where they were. Then I thought, "How the hell did we get around before cell phones?"

Like cell phones, MP3 technology is now a part of our culture. It's a new medium for music, and I think it's great because it exposes music to a wider group of people. Hardcore fans will be willing to buy the album to support me, so I'm not concerned there. MP3's allow you to enter a market that was probably not there before. It allows your music to be more accessible to [a wider audience] and has the potential to create even more fans for you.

Even if I became a professional musician, I would hope that people share my stuff. If you're

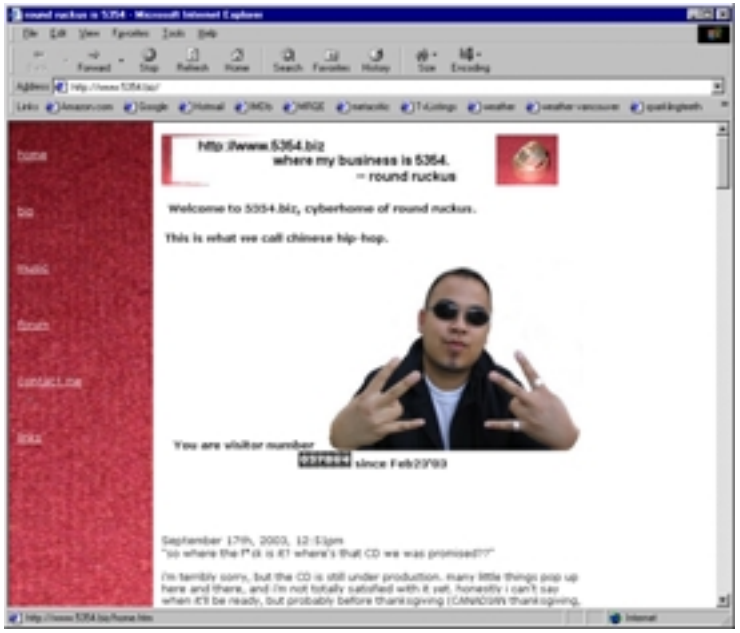
a student and you have no money, you have to budget your money wisely, especially if you live on your own. For me, music is about something you can share with other people. I'd be happy if people listen to my stuff. I can make my money off of other things like doing concerts or gigs at [coffee shops]. I might get in trouble if I say this, but I think it's a great medium. MP3 is awesome. I totally support it.

Is there anything you would like to say to your fans?

Thank you for all the support! I've had a lot of people e-mailing me about when the album is going to be done, what it's going to be about, and just general so it sounds like it's going pretty good. I've had people e-mailing me saying that they pump "Bong, Bong, Bong" at Pacific Mall. That's pretty cool. I'm happy about that, definitely.

Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

Cool, cool. Thank you.


http://www.5354.biz
where my business is 5354.
= round ruckus
Welcome to 5354.biz, cyberhome of round ruckus.
This is what we call chinese hip-hop.

DOWNLOAD YER FRESH CHOONS HERE!

WINONA TONG has good taste in music. round_ruckus' MP3s can be downloaded from www.5354.biz.

Glossary

5354 – pronounced "mmm saam mmm say"; Cantonese slang for "improper"
ABC – American Born Chinese
CBC – Canadian Born Chinese
FOB – fresh off the boat; originally a derogatory term for immigrants, but now used as a joke, especially since most immigrants arrive via passenger jets.
HK – Hong Kong
Jook-sing – term for those of Chinese descent born outside of Asia
Mainland – of or pertaining to mainland China

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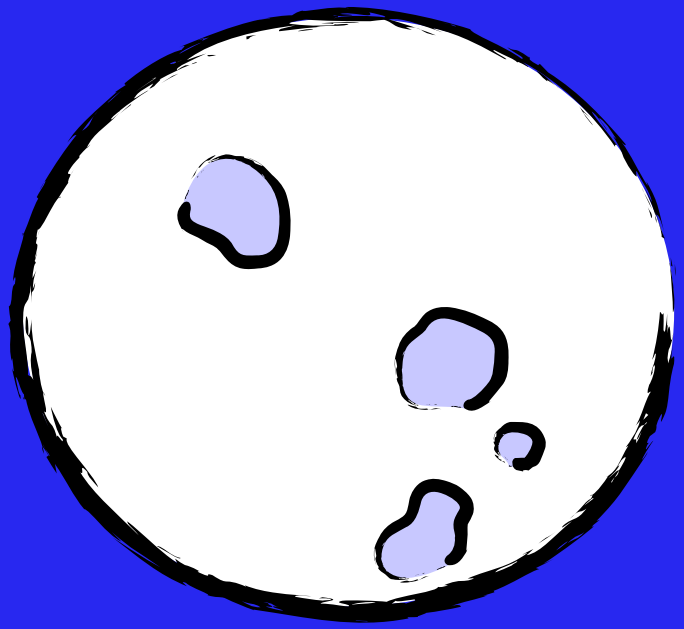

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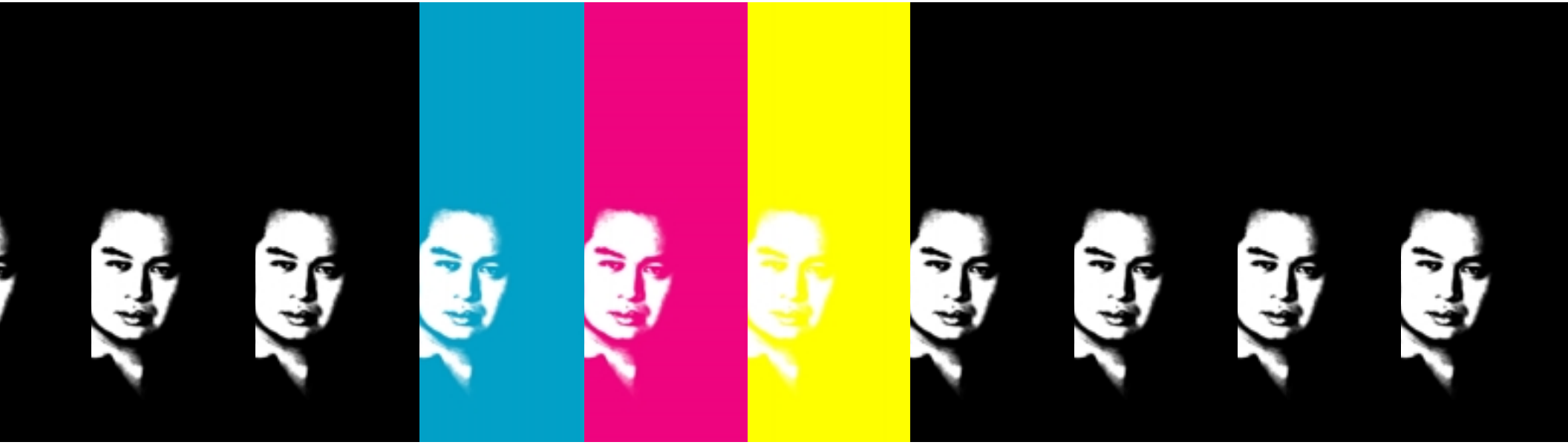
watching



DRAMATIC LICENSE: TREADING THE BOARDS WITH LEON AUREUS ARTISTIC PRODUCER OF THE FU-GEN ASIAN-CANADIAN THEATRE COMPANY

by Kuan Foo

One of the sad facts of growing up Asian-Canadian is the knowledge that there is not a whole lot in North American popular culture that reflects your experiences. Turn on the radio and you are not likely to hear any Asian-North American music. Channel surf and you will not see Asian-North American sitcoms. However since early 2002, the fu-GEN Asian-Canadian Theatre company have ensured that at least the Toronto stage has not been completely devoid of Asian-Canadian content. In pursuing their primary mandate of developing Asian-Canadian artists, fu-GEN has mounted productions and staged readings of new and existing works by Asian-North American writers, offering Asian-Canadian actors opportunities to play meaningful roles. *bambooda* spoke to actor and playwright Leon Aureus, artistic producer and founding member of fu-GEN.

What is the fu-GEN Theatre Company?

The fu-GEN Theatre Company is a Toronto-based theatre company whose mission is the development of Asian-Canadian artists through the production of new and established works. Founded in 2002, the company has

Revolution is just a T-shirt away! Aureus (far left) and some of his fu-GEN cohorts (from left to right) In-Surp Choi, Nina Aquino, Richard Lee, David Yee and Dale Yim.

grown rapidly and we have several ongoing projects and initiatives in play. These include my stage adaptation of Terry Woo's novel *Banana Boys*; a new play by David Yee called Filial at this year's Summerworks Festival; Terry Watada's *Tale of a Mask*; a playwright's workshop; and weekly play readings/skills workshops.

Where does the name come from?

Originally we started off under the name of *Gum San*, a Cantonese term used by early Chinese immigrants in North America that means "Golden Mountain." Some members felt that this name had antiquated connotations so we put the name up for suggestions and a democratic vote. I was quite underwhelmed by many of the suggested names, until one fine day, I received inspiration from an unlikely source: one of my readers of an Internet blog I keep, half-jokingly suggested I call the company "fu-gen," short for "f'n-geniuses." At first I laughed, but as I mulled it over, I realized that fu-gen could also be short for "future generation" or if you softened the "g" it could be pronounced "fusion." Since our company represents the future generation of artists in

Canada and we're bringing together the best elements of Eastern and Western cultures, fu-GEN was a perfect fit. Oh yeah, and we really are f'n geniuses!

Why do you think there has to be a theatre company specifically for Asian-Canadians?

There needs to be a home where Asian-Canadian artists can grow and hone their craft as professionals. I'm not saying that opportunities don't exist out there in the community-at-large, but they are arguably quite limited. So, rather than complain about the lack of meaningful roles out there and wait for the opportunities to come to us, we've decided to be proactive and write our own stories, build our own stage from which to learn, grow and perform. We want to break free from the shadows of "community theatre" and outdated, stereotyped roles.

Why make the specific distinction of Asian-Canadian? In part, it's addressing our own personal experiences as Asian-Canadians seeking to establish an identity for ourselves here in North America where we've found a lack of stories and venues. It's also a practical consideration based on our need to focus our limited resources on a specific area rather than try to do too much at once.

What is Asian-Canadian theatre?

Asian-Canadian theatre can mean different things to different people. To me, it means any theatrical work written by, or under the artistic guidance of an Asian-Canadian artist whereby they are expressing their unique views/experiences. A room full of Asian-Canadians reading the work of Shaw is not necessarily Asian-Canadian theatre, but if they seek to revisit or represent Shaw's work in a fresh new manner that introduces a unique Asian-Canadian perspective, then there could be an argument that it is indeed an Asian-Canadian work. To boil it down to its simplest terms — if it's written, directed and to a certain extent acted by an Asian-Canadian artist then it's likely Asian-Canadian theatre.

What is your role in the company?

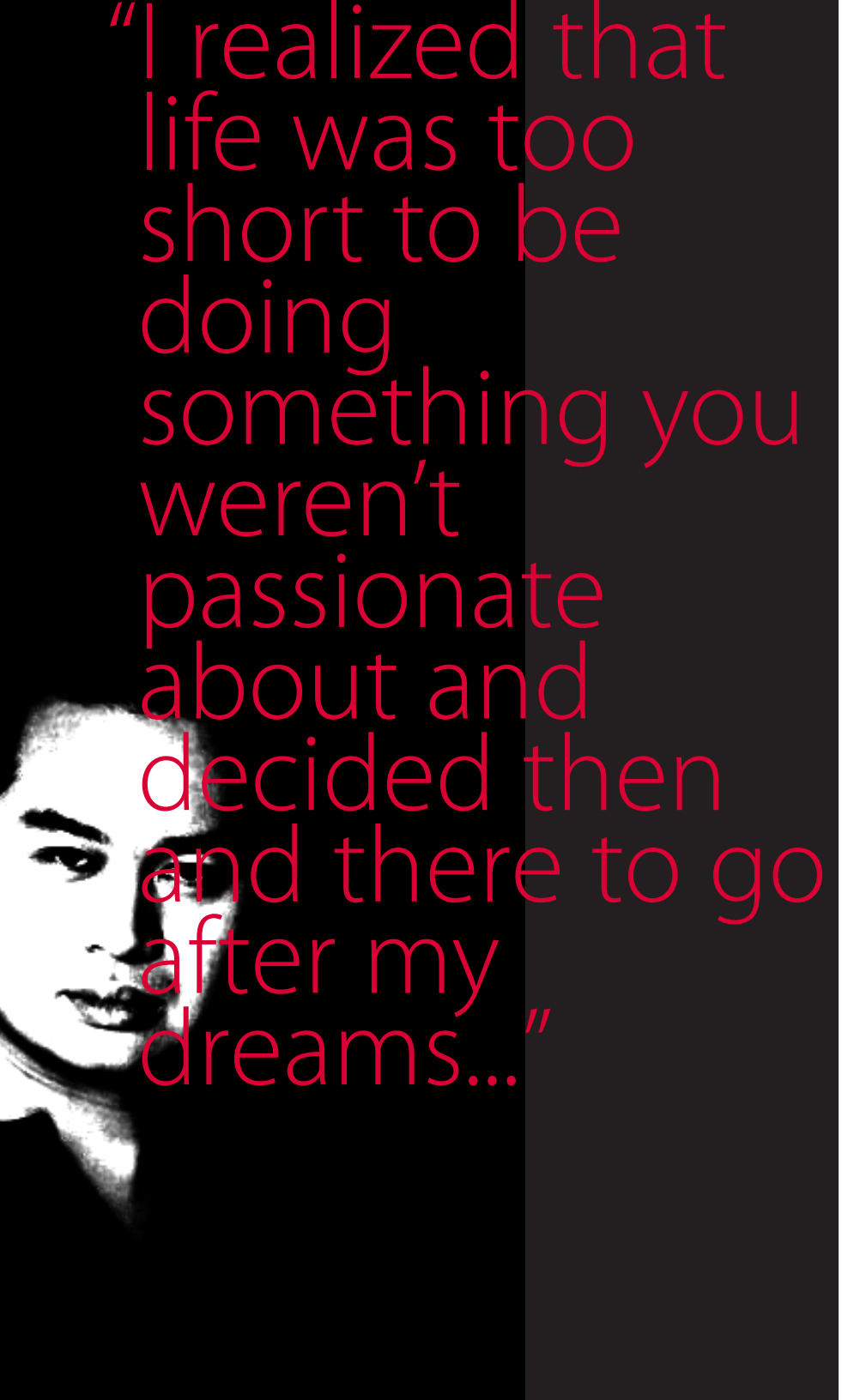
As artistic producer, I work closely with the artistic director and I'm responsible for the big picture of the company's long-term strategy and operation. I'm continually trying to build the company's recognition and garner financial support through private and public sources — which means I have to do a lot of schmoozing and grant or proposal writing.

Who are some of the other key people?

Nina Aquino is the artistic director of the company. She's directly responsible for running the company and it's artistic vision. She's also a playwright, a director and a dramaturge with an MA in Theatre — definitely the best person for the job. Richard Lee is the general manager who handles the day-to-day operations and is a fantastic actor. David Yee is the associate producer who also happens to be an amazing playwright. As you can see, we all have to wear many hats.

What are your goals for fu-GEN?

Our first goal is for fu-GEN to become a professional theatre company that continually produces quality work and supports Asian-Canadian artists. We hope to build a strong administrative and operational foundation from which our efforts will continue for years to come. We want fu-GEN to be the home of many rising young actors and writers, at first in the realm of Asian-Canadian, but in the long term we hope to make it a hotbed of creative activity regardless of who you are. But that's still a few years down the road…


"I realized that life was too short to be doing something you weren't passionate about and decided then and there to go after my dreams..."

Switching gears from the group to you, how long have you wanted to be an actor?

Nearly every actor will tell you they've known that they wanted to be a performer at a young age. I'm not an exception to this and have all kinds of childhood memories. For example, when I was 3 or 4, my dad took me to a company picnic where I was soon surrounded by his doting women co-workers. At first I played all shy and coy, but distinctly remember gauging my effect on my "audience" as I busted out my repertoire of pouts and grins — I'm told I even did this "strongman" posing routine. As I was showered with kisses and hugs, I remember thinking, that there was definitely a future in this, heh-heh.

Was there a pivotal moment when you thought, this is what I want to do?

Two actually. The first was in grade eight when I wrote, acted and directed this "epic" mini-play for English class complete with props, costumes and a piano-accompanied score. This prompted my teacher to write, "A Star is Born" in my yearbook encouraging me to pursue dramatic arts in high school — which I did.

The second was a few months into my time with a consulting firm. I had just graduated from university after effectively burying my dramatic pursuits for most of my university career. I was working in management consulting firm and though I was paid well, I felt unfulfilled by the long hours and stressful deadlines. I realized that life was too short to be doing something you weren't passionate about and decided then and there to go after my dreams.

What are some of the other things you've been involved in?

I'm also a founding member of Step-Up, one of Toronto's fastest rising improv-comedy troupes. I've co-written and co-produced all our shows — *Bollywood or Bust*, *Mission Improv* and *Be Mine Valentine!* — in venues such as Second City and the Toronto Centre for the Arts. We're also developing a TV show that's to be pitched to several Canadian networks.

In 2002, I wrote, directed, produced and acted in *Friends Like These*, a short film that was nominated for Best Canadian Short at the ReelWorld Film Festival.

Growing up, did you have any role models or heroes?

I think every Asian guy at one point or other looked up to Bruce Lee. I still do, but more so now for his philosophies on life and art rather than his ability to kick ass — although that's still cool! Gene Kelly, Spiderman, The Three Stooges and Marcus Aurelius — the Roman emperor/philosopher — were also influential.

Who are some people whose work you currently admire?

I'm definitely inspired by the people I work with at fu-GEN and Step-Up. They're all such very talented, dedicated and generous people. You couldn't ask for a better group of people to fill your days with.

You mentioned earlier that you are currently adapting Terry Woo's novel Banana Boys for the stage. What attracted you to this project?

It was such a rush to finally read something that dealt with what it's like to be a young Asian-Canadian man growing up in the 80's and 90's. Even though I'm Filipino-Canadian and the book is about Chinese-Canadians, there are enough similarities that it was relevant for me. There are also many other levels on which people can enjoy it, regardless of ethnicity or gender.

What were some of the challenges of going from novel to play?

The primary challenge was sculpting down the large mass of narrative and dialogue that is a novel, into the combination of words and visuals that is a play. Each of Terry's five primary characters has a richly detailed story and I had to work hard to capture that in a play that's roughly two hours in length.

When can we expect to see it?

Earlier this year, we workshopped and polished the script — a process that culminated in a public reading of the play in July. Now it's time for me to take off my playwright's hat and replace it with my producer's cap to work on acquiring as much support and funding as possible for the full production that we've slated in the summer of 2004. Wish me luck and e-mail me with any areas support you can think of, because ultimately the community's support will decide the long-term success and relevance of the theatre company.

KUAN FOO suffers from stage fright. For more information on the fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre, check out www.fu-gen.org.

2003 Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival

November 26 - 30, 2003

Refugee (USA) d: Spencer Nakasako

Part of the "Homelands 'N' 'Hoods" shorts programme: Forget drugs, crime, poverty - it's dealing with family histories, secrets and obligations that will ultimately test these boyz from the 'hood. Kinetic, moving, and totally fascinating.

Robot Stories (USA) d: Grek Pak *Toronto Premiere*

Witness a first-time feature director defeat the million-dollar sci-fi special effects moguls with a small indie picture! Robot Stories contrasts the hidden humanity of machines against the rigid artificial nature of humans in the spirit of the speculative fiction of the '50s and '60s.

For more information, schedule and complete list of films:

www.reelasian.com

info@reelasian.com

toronto reel ASIAN international film festival

eating

[INDIAN / CHINESE]

CHILI PEPPER HOUSE

#1-3003 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC

This is a good place for people who can't decide between Chinese and East Indian food. Newly opened in the spring of 2003, the location was previously an extremely dirty "health violation" type Chinese restaurant. Now it's been completely renovated and cleaned up. With a name like "Chili Pepper House," you know it's gonna be killer hot; ask for "mild" if you're a wimp. Some dishes are average, but the excellent ones make up for it. The **Mongolian Style Beef** ($9.25) has sliced beef in a thick gravy-like sauce: it looks rich, but tastes a bit bland. The **House Style Omelette** ($7.25) was supposed to have crab and shrimp, but we found very little crab. The standout dish was the **Manchurian Style Eggplant** ($8.25), deep, rich, spicy and extremely flavourful. The **Manchurian Style Prawns** ($14.95) were also good, with minced garlic and chili. The **House Style Fish** ($11.95) was so freaking hot, it had us crying with pleasure. The fish looks like a pomfret, and was cooked in that dry, pan-fried style. The **Manchurian Style Shrimp Fried Rice** ($7.95) was like regular Chinese fried rice, except with an Indian curry flavour thrown in. The combination of flavours was a new experience for us, and we liked it a lot. The people who run the restaurant are actually from Calcutta. Their family ran a Chinese restaurant there, where they started to incorporate a lot of Indian spices into their cooking. This place has a lot of South Asian clientele, which is probably a good sign (just like how the better Japanese restaurants have actual Japanese people going to them). 15% off pick-up orders! Avoid the naan though, it's the store-bought kind that's like pita bread.

BOTTOM LINE: *Chinese with an Indian kick.*

Top: Manchurian Style Prawns. Bottom left: Manchurian Style Eggplant tastes better than it looks. Bottom right: Mongolian Style Beef looks better than it tastes.

[INDIAN / CHINESE]

GREEN LETTUCE

1949 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC

This is the city's oldest Indian/Chinese combination style restaurant. The **Szechuan Beef** is a great dish with big beefy and spicy flavour. On the other hand, the **Vegetable Korma** was nothing special. The standout dish is the **Bombay Style Prawns** which consists of prawns dipped in batter and deep-fried, with a delicious garlicy/sweet/hot/sour sauce poured on top. The **Chicken Satay** had an Indian curry flavour, which was a nice change from the Malaysian-style satays. The **Pili Chicken** was nothing special. They have bottles of Manchurian sauce for sale if you want to try replicating the taste at home. The naan here is the store-bought kind, so don't expect the freshly baked stuff. For desert, we tried the **Deep-Fried Banana and Pineapple**, but when we actually got it, it had a quarter of a banana, ONE pineapple ring and a lousy scoop of vanilla ice cream . . . all for $4.50. Yeeesh. 15% off pick-up orders.

BOTTOM LINE: *They were here first.*

Left: clockwise from top, Tofu in Black Bean Sauce, Vegetable Korma, Szechuan Beef, Bombay Style Prawns. Bottom left: Chicken Satay.

[JAPANESE]

CLUBHOUSE

255 West 2nd Ave, Vancouver, BC
http://members.shaw.ca/jeremedia/clubhouse/

Above, from the top: daily drink specials for those who like a bit of booze with their Japanese food; Deep Fried BC Roll; Beef Okonomiyaki (the beef is inside...really). Right: Salmon Sukiyaki.

If you've seen the Japanese cult hit *Wild Zero*, this is probably the type of restaurant that would inhabit that film: a casual, funky, diner-type restaurant run by an obvious golf nut. The owner is Japanese, so automatically this place is better than a lot of "Japanese" restaurants in Vancouver. There's lots of variety on the menu, large portions, and good value for the money. You'll find some funky and wacky items on the menu, like maki-sushi with cream cheese inside. The **Marinated Tuna** appetizer ($4.50) has a nice flavour. Too bad the nigiri sushi here is just average. The best rolls are the deep fried ones, served with a gingery/sesame/soy dipping sauce. The cooked food here is great. **Wild Sockeye Salmon Sukiyaki Dinner** ($8.95) is a tasty change from the regular beef sukiyaki. The **Assorted Seafood Tempura Dinner** ($15.95) comes with a huge amount of nicely done tempura (light and crispy, not crunchy or heavy) that's enough for two people. You must try the **Okonomiyaki** (various kinds, $6+). Okonomiyaki, also known as Japanese pizza or Japanese pancake, is shredded cabbage mixed with an eggy batter, and cooked on a grill like a pancake. It's topped with a tasty brown sauce, mayo, bonito flakes, seaweed powder and pickled ginger. I got mine with *mochi* (sweet rice cake) inside, which makes it a really nice sweet/savory flavor combination.

BOTTOM LINE: *Great place for cooked Japanese food.*

Above: the sleek interior of Hapa Izakaya. Right, clockwise from top left: Slow-Simmered Pork, Eggplant on Rice Crackers, Shrimp with Spicy Mayo, Tofu Desert, Salmon Carpacio, and Grilled Mackerel.

If you're in the mood for Pan-Asian tapas, Hapa Izakaya is a place you can try. I'm not too fond of tapas, and after tasting the overpriced average food here, I don't think I'll be changing my mind any time soon. They've taken dishes from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cuisine, and instead of fusing them together, they've kept them as-is, just changing their context. Although the design of the whole place is nice — dark, trendy — and the menus are cute, the food isn't at the same level. The **Deep-Fried Shrimp with Spicy Mayo Sauce** ($6.50) was poorly done. The batter on the tempura-style prawns was soft and almost tough. The **Eggplant on Rice Crackers** is a Szechuan-style dish, but the rice crackers were hard and chewy instead of crispy/crunchy. The **Slow-Simmered Chinese Pork with Steamed Buns** was done really well, but at $6.80 for a tiny serving, you're better off going to a true Shanghai restaurant. If you've got money to throw around, and the word "tapas" doesn't make you cringe, then by all means try this place out. Otherwise, there are better places to spend your money.

BOTTOM LINE: *Try it yourself and make up your own mind.*

[JAPANESE]

HAPA IZAKAYA

1479 Robson St, Vancouver, BC

[JAPANESE]

SUSHI GO

Champlain Square
7026 Kerr St, Vancouver, BC

The majority of the cheap sushi joints in Vancouver are exactly that: CHEAP. Skimpy nigiri with terrible rice and razor-thin slices of fish, and crappy rolls. But Sushi Go is different. Run by actual Japanese people, Sushi Go offers high-quality sushi at cheap prices, all made with care and consistency. There are no noodles and not much cooked food; the focus here is definitely on the sushi. The place is small, with only a few small tables, but it's clean with a minimalist design. This is the place to go for take-out. You should arrive to pick up your order around 10 minutes later than the specified time, because they are a little slow — but at least it's consistently slow. 5% off if you order more than two hours in advance.

BOTTOM LINE: *Cheap AND good.*

Nigiri sushi à la carte: Masago (Smelt Egg), Chopped Scallop with Tobiko (Flying Fish Egg), Hokkigai (Surf Clam), Salmon, Mackerel, and Toro (Fatty Tuna).

[JAPANESE]

TAKA SUSHI

2059 West 4th Ave, Vancouver, BC

After many bad experiences at Vancouver's many "Japanese" restaurants, it was refreshing to eat at Taka Sushi. The food there restored my faith in Japanese food when I was in a real low point in my culinary life. Here it's quality Japanese food prepared by real Japanese people. The nigiri sushi I ordered was tasty, with fresh, clear flavours. The boneless **Chicken Karaage** ($6.75) was crisp on the outside and juicy on the inside and served with a nice gingery dipping sauce that made it a cut above the regular karaage. The **Nabeyaki Udon** ($8.50) had a taste that was simple but had lots of depth and it came in the perfect serving size, with a nice balance between the noodles and toppings. I'm starting to think that as far as Japanese restaurants go, quality of the food is directly correlated with the quality of the dishware. All the bowls and plates here were real hand-made, hand-painted pieces, not chipped plastic crap.

BOTTOM LINE: *Quality food at a fair price.*

Clockwise from top left: Nabeyaki Udon, Chicken Karaage, an assortment of Nigiri Sushi (the red piece is Marinated Bell Pepper which was delicious!).

[KOREAN]

JANG MO JIB

Biltmore Hotel
395 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC

Let's face it. Korean BBQ is smoky, smelly, and a lot of work. Jang Mo Jib is an excellent alternative if you want honest, straightforward Korean food without all the fuss. The **Korean Seafood Pancake** ($14.95) is like a Korean version of okonomiyaki, except without the mayo and stuff on top. Green onion is vital to holding the pancake together, so if you're adverse to onions...well, maybe it's time to start liking onions! The **BBQ Mackerel** ($9.95) is grilled to delicious perfection. Meaty and savory. **Bulgogi Beef** ($12.95) uses juicy and tender rib eye, and comes on a hot plate. A great dish made better with the inclusion of sliced carrots, zuccini, mushrooms and onion. The **Gam Ja Tahng** ($24.95) is a spicy pork-back stew that serves two, but in reality could feed three or four people. This is a hearty warm-you-up-during-those-cold-winters type of dish. It comes in a big pot on a burner, so it stays piping hot throughout your meal. Push the green onions into the soup and let them cook, they're delicious. The only disappointment here is their specialty **Sul Lung Tahng** ($7.95), which is a beef bone broth that is cooked for 24 hours. We found it really plain and bland. Perhaps we should've added a healthy dose of salt to it. Since we've eaten at Jang Mo Jib, they've moved locations, to further up Kingsway, into the lobby of the king of cheesy Vancouver hotels, the Biltmore Hotel. So now you can eat a feast, get drunk, and sleep it off, all at the same location.

BOTTOM LINE: *Best home-style Korean food in Vancouver.*

Clockwise from top left: delicious Korean side dishes, Pork-Back Stew, Beef Bone Broth, Bulgogi Beef, Korean Seafood Pancake, BBQ Mackerel.

Above: a fine selection of condiments, including Ikan Bilis (dried fish and nuts). Right, from top: Oyster Omlette and Roti Canai, Lamb Curry, and Murtabak (roti stuffed with beef).

[SINGAPOREAN]

RASA SINGAPURA

Richmond Public Market
#2100-8260 Westminster Hwy, Richmond, BC

Delicious hawker-style Singaporean food. It's located in a food court at a public market, so they've got a few curries on the steam tables, but everything else they cook-to-order. All the different kinds of noodles or rice dishes you could want, from **Nasi Goreng** (fried rice with a fried egg on top, $6.50), to **Laksa Lemak** (rice noodles in a spicy coconut gravy/soup, $5.50). Their **sambal sauce** is awesome! You can't buy anything like it elsewhere. It's spicy, sweet, and slightly nutty — a great hot sauce. Good thing you can buy a little container of it to take home. The chunks of cucumbers and pickled radish and carrots that come with the rice dishes are a nice touch. To tame the spiciness, add a fresh large **lemonade** to your meal for $1.50.

BOTTOM LINE: *Even Singaporeans eat here.*

Clockwise from top: Banh Hoi Nem Nuong, Vermicelli, Beef Ball Pho, and Grilled Pork Chop on Rice.

[VIETNAMESE]

SAIGON Y2K

2110 Crowchild Trail NW, Calgary, Alberta

Calgary doesn't have as many Vietnamese restaurants as Vancouver, but Saigon Y2K easily holds its own against Vancouver's best. Never mind the horrible name, this place has all the typical Vietnamese dishes like pho, rice and vermicelli. Those are all good, but the best thing here is the *banh hoi* (thin vermicelli bundles), which is served like a do-it-yourself salad roll. For example, the **Banh Hoi Nem Nuong** ($9.95) comes with small round sheets of rice paper, which you use to wrap up banh hoi, lettuce, herbs, and grilled nem nuong (a delicious sweet pork sausage). You dip your wrap in fish sauce and eat it. Banh hoi is thinner than the usual vermicelli, so it has a different texture when you eat it. This is a not-too-common dish done very well here. If you've got a large appetite, try the big banh hoi combo for $10.75 which comes with nem nuong, *la lop* (a sourish beef sausage wrapped in grape leaves), and *chao tom* (like fish balls, except using shrimp meat instead of fish).

BOTTOM LINE: *They have banh hoi!*

Reviews and photos by twenty-four hour lobster.

YUMMY PRODUCT OF THE MONTH: CALBEE'S HOT GARLIC SHRIMP CHIPS

By Dennis Chui

When we were growing up, shrimp chips were a snack-food staple in our household. Now they've come up with a new spicy twist on the old sticks (and just in time, too, because I was getting pretty bored with the old regular flavor). The new **Hot Garlic** flavor is simply great. Spiciness is a little bit above mild, and the garlicy-ness is just right. Goes great with the latest kung-fu DVDs or Korean soap operas. Too bad they don't have the funny illustrations on the back anymore. I miss the drawing of the white dude having shrimp chips with a big mug of beer.

Also available in Wasabi flavor. Available at fine Asian markets everywhere.

spending

THE BEST INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORE IN VANCOUVER FOR GEEKS

By Dennis Chui

A so-called "multilingual media shop", **Sophia Books** is a great little store that carries books that'll appeal to geeks everywhere. They have a great selection of cool photography/design/art books, plus a big selection of french comics (think *Tin Tin*) and Japanese manga. Their magazine section is quite extensive too — lots of art/design/fashion-related magazines from US, UK, Europe and Japan. They even carry *Petit-Glam*! The owner is a French guy, and the store is staffed by Japanese people. No wonder they've also got a big selection of foreign-language-learning books and tapes as well.

SOPHIA BOOKS is located at 492 West Hastings St. Check out their website at www.sophiabooks.com.

100 YEN STORE COMES TO BC

By Dennis Chui

100 yen stores (like dollar-stores here) have been growing in popularity in Japan for the past decade. **Konbiniya the 100 Yen Store** does dollar-stores one better by carrying a nice selection of Japanese snacks, groceries and good 'n cheap bento boxes and maki to-go. We picked up a negitoro hand-roll (like a short and fat uncut maki roll, filled with chopped tuna and green onion) for $1.50. Buy two of them plus a Calpis drink ($1.49) and you'd have a nice lunch. Or try a 16-piece maki combo (which has tuna, cucumber, salmon and pickled radish) for only $3.50.

KONBINIYA is located at 5851 No. 5 Road, Richmond, BC.

RICHMOND NIGHT MARKET

By Dennis Chui

This is a pig's paradise. If you like walking around and eating lots of little grilled/steamed/fried things on sticks, then you must check it out. Forget about the "3 pairs for $20" shoes, the cell phone accessories, and the knives that can cut through bone (as the demonstration reveals), just head straight for the food area. There's Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese food all for the eating. And that disgusting smell that's like walking into a giant cave of halitosis is the smell of the "stinky tofu", a delicious Taiwanese dish that they sell right beside the curried snails. I'm so there.

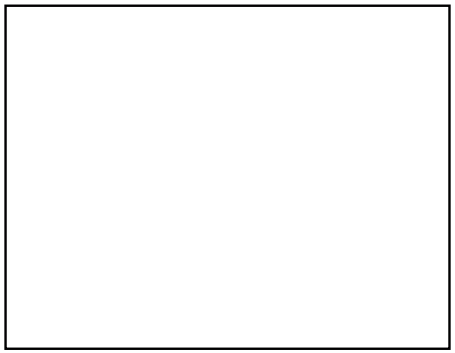
THE RICHMOND NIGHT MARKET runs on weekends from June to September in Richmond, BC.

All the hustle and bustle of a real Asian night market, without the smell of pee. Clockwise from top right: making Dragon's Beard Candy; the famous guy making those egg ball waffles; crepes; steamed dim sum; real sugar cane juice; takoyaki (octopus balls)

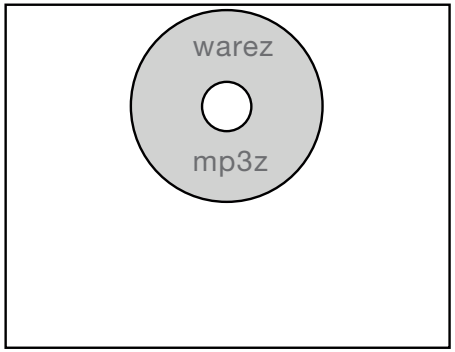
geeking

THE BAMBOODA SEMI-INSTANT CHEAPO 2-DISC CD SLEEVE

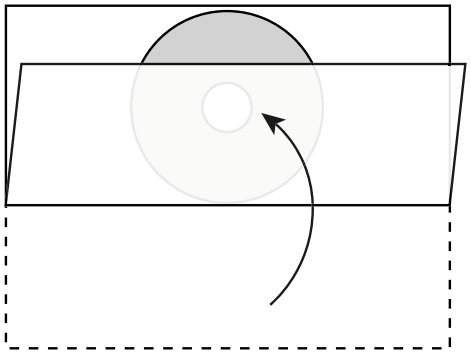
Developed by Dennis Chui



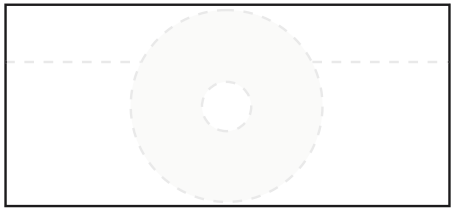
1. Take a regular sheet of 8.5" x 11" paper.



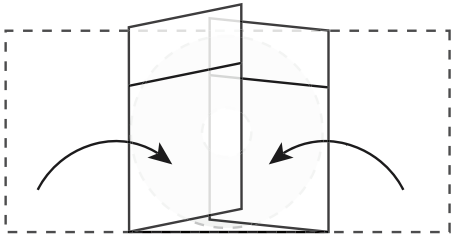
2. Place a cd on the paper as shown above.



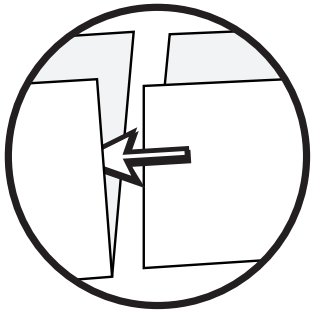
3. Fold the paper upwards.



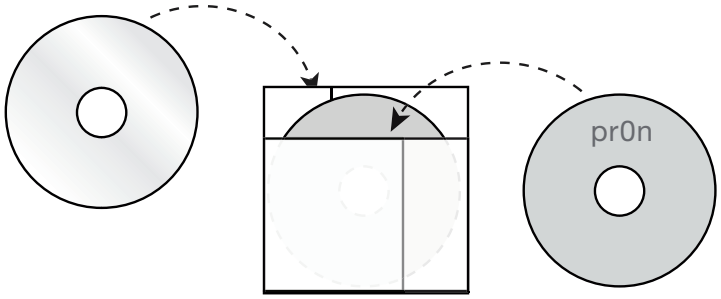
4. Flip the whole thing over horizontally.



5. Fold the sides inward.



6. Tuck one end into the other.



7. You now have a cheap 2-disc sleeve!

The only disadvantage with this design is that the corners and flaps of paper can get wrinkled and banged up...but what do you expect for 1¢?

I ENJOY BEING A NERD
by Kuan Foo

"I'm not ashamed. It's the computer age, nerds are in. They're still in, right?"
– Willow Rosenberg, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

DO YOU EXHIBIT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS?

- *You substitute verbatim recitations of Monty Python skits for actual conversation.*
- *You file your possessions in alphabetical, numerical, chronological or biographical order.*
- *You use words like "megapixel," "20-sided dice," "hentai" or "Slartibartfast" as the punch lines of jokes.*
- *You can converse freely in one or more of the following languages: binary code, semaphore, Pig Latin, Klingon.*
- *You have a long-standing argument with your friends as to who was the greater role model, Gandhi or Gandalf.*
- *You wear t-shirts with comic book or anime characters on them — and you're 35.*
- *You think* The Matrix *is real.*

If you said yes to any or all of the preceding, you just may be that lowliest of social creatures, the passionate obsessive; to wit, a nerd. Fear not; you are among friends. The world is filled with nerds of every age, gender and obsession, united only by high intelligence, diminished social skills and a near-autistic ability to narrow-focus.

Math Nerds are plentiful in high school and university but seem to crumble to dust upon making contact with the real world. You remember that guy who memorized π to 549 decimal places or that girl who would calculate the number of nitrogen atoms in the room just for fun? Neither do I — but I've seen their pictures in the yearbook. As socially elusive as the square root of minus one, they tend to become actuaries as they don't quite have the charisma for accounting.

Collectors or ***Otaku*** form the foundation of the entertainment merchandizing industry. Whether collecting comics, records, stamps or toys, Otaku are energetic in their appreciation of their collections, encyclopaedic in their knowledge of related trivia and utterly psychotic in their need to have complete, catalogued sets. They can be spotted by their studious lack of personal hygiene and an ability to infuse each syllable of the sentence, "do not bend the spine!" with equal weight.

Techno-Geeks are commonly found skulking around the very offices in which they once reigned supreme. Historical ages can be defined by the grand questions they pose: the Stone Age was signified by "What are going to we eat?" the Dawn of Civilization by "How can we all get along?" and the Enlightenment by "Who am I and what

Math Nerd

Otaku

Techno-Geek

is my place in the universe?" Similarly, everything you need to know about the Computer Age can be found in the question "Why is it doing that?" and its corollary, "Can you make it work?" For a brief and shining moment in the late 90s, the Techno-Geek strutted around the office as the sole possessor of the answers to those questions. Many a powerful CEO spent a nervous afternoon hovering over a Techno-Geek's shoulder as an important report was recovered or a hard drive defragged. Sadly, as user interfaces became friendlier and pre-schoolers began designing websites, the Techno-Geek's status slipped. Today they lurk sullenly around the mainframe, awaiting the next tech revolution and occasionally removing RAM from the PCs of people that piss them off.

Post-modern Retro Ironic Geeks (PRIGs) are possibly the only organisms in the known universe capable of the cognitive acrobatics of being mockingly sincere. Simply put, they indulge in nerdy behaviour, but claim they are in on the joke: the sort of people who "ironically" list their religion on the census as "Jedi Knight" but actually sort of mean it. PRIGs generally feel universally displaced and would rather belong to any other century (or planet) than this one. Hence, they are found populating role-playing game clubs, creative anachronism societies and renaissance fairs, but only "for fun, because I'm really not into that stuff." Most are die-hard Trekkies (while simultaneously mocking Kirk's sideburns), but if pressed they will concede that Star Wars "could've happened; after all, it was a long time ago in galaxy far, far away."

PRIG

Aesthetes are kind of stealth nerds; they're clean and well dressed, and blend in with the general populace so well that they are often mistaken for simple snobs. However, get Aesthetes talking about their particular obsession — be it vinyl records vs. compact disks, overlooked 20th century poets or Apple computers — and you are in for a diatribe that makes *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* seem like a limerick. Aesthetes equate aesthetic preferences with irrefutable, scientific facts and cite obscure articles (written by other Aesthetes) to back up their long-winded arguments. The vehemence with which they argue the correctness of their opinions is fuelled by lingering resentment at having lost the VHS vs. Betamax war in the 80s. They can often be found exhorting people to "think different(ly)," smirking knowingly in art galleries — or editing magazines.

So you see, whether we are labelled geeks, poindexters, Doogies, wonks, brainiacs, or dorks,

Aesthete

the nerd army is all around you and growing daily. We number among the doctors, the scientists, the librarians and the teachers, as well as more or less constituting the entire IT industry. So, let your geek flag fly and embrace your dorkitude, secure in the knowledge that sometimes the only way to achieve depth is by being at the bottom of the social dogpile. We may not be the most popular kid in school, but we can hack into his permanent records and deep-six his credit rating. After all, is it not written that the geek shall inherit the earth? That is, if the rest of you don't mind.

KUAN FOO is a nerd.

DEAR DIARY . . . AND THE REST OF WORLD
THE WIDE WORLD OF WEBLOGGING

By Terry Chan

When Isabel L. sits down in front of the tube, she habitually surfs for reality-based content to kill time. There's never a short supply. At any given time, she can find anecdotes, tearjerkers, and even the life-changing events of complete strangers all unravelling in front of her eyes. On most nights, she is content to be one of thousands of consumers of such readily available amusement. But on some nights, she sticks herself under this massive spotlight to allow others a peek at facets of her life. And she immediately commands a captive audience.

This is not "reality" TV. This is the world of "blogging" (short for "weblogging"): online journals of everyday folks made available to the masses via the World Wide Web. Although blogging was once the exclusive preserve of the web literate, the emergence of dedicated blogging services such as **Xanga.com** and **LiveJournal.com** have made one-click publishing accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. Blog entries are like time-stamped, instantaneously published pages of a diary. Without the filters of editors or network executives, readers get a raw dose of reality directly from the mind of the writer.

Suddenly, the Internet has become a blogging community in which every Joe on the block can be a micro-celebrity. All you have to do is post something that resonates with even the most meagre percentage of Internet readers. It can be a masterpiece or just some thoughts scribbled at random, but the sheer enormity of the Internet guarantees that someone out there is bound to like it. For example, Isabel, who goes by the screen name "fozzy," maintains a site on Xanga.com and has her own following of readers who admire her gritty and skilful entries.

While the overwhelming majority of online journals tend to be mundane records of the bloggers' daily activities (what Isabel calls a "today-I-painted-my-toenails-pink kind of blog"), there are still many writers who relish the liberating feeling of writing freely and construct thoughtful articles for a global audience.

Michael Leung (**www.xanga.com/mleung**) is a Canadian journalist who hails from Calgary and is currently working in China. At first, Leung kept a blog strictly as his journal and travelogue for friends and family

Canadian journalist Michael Leung's blog site

Sojourn
旅居
did I come out here to lose myself or to find myself?
Back in the Motherland
sparklingteeth - signout - weblogs
home
subscribe
questbook
e-mail me
share this skin!
sub me?
Yeah. Ok.
Tuesday, October 28, 2003
Straw poll. Please put in your vote and/or opinion.
who am I?
Real Name: Mike Leung
Location: China
Industry: Business
Email: Click Here
Mike Leung is a journalist, designer, photographer and Canadian currently residing in China. He works for the Canada China Business Council. He hates
Option 1. Continue the life of decadence and high flying and come back to Earth some

Left: "fozzy's" site on Xanga.com. Right: sites like Livejournal.com are one-stop shops for setting up your own blog site.

back home to read. Gradually however, blogging became more than just dinner table banter in cyberspace as he started to connect with fellow bloggers to exchange ideas and information. When asked what makes blogging interesting, Leung says, "[It's] like writing out a voice in your head, but suddenly there are others to hear that voice." What readers wholeheartedly identify with is the reality of blog entries. As Leung explains, "Suddenly, these words, these emotions, they become real and shared."

On many blog sites, people are allowed to leave comments on entries, allowing bloggers instant feedback and interaction with their readers. Not surprisingly, many bloggers consider the giving and receiving of comments to be the most thrilling aspect of blogging. Naturally, well-written blogs receive more feedback from readers, including writing guidance, praise and reassurance. In fact, the unbiased comments of total strangers located multiple time zones away can give insightful opinions on a blogger's dilemma. Isabel confesses that she often pours her soul out on her blog and seeks advice from her readers because, "I don't go to my friends for the kind of advice I go to Xanga for. I would have to say that some of these strangers know me more than my friends do and I don't think I mind it much…"

Since Asian-American/Canadian bloggers can easily identify with each other's lives and stories, it is not uncommon for groups of bloggers to extend their virtual friendship into the real world (Note: always practice common sense and consider safety issues when meeting people from the Internet). This is especially common in cities with large Asian populations such as Toronto, New York and Vancouver. This phenomenon of blurring real world/virtual world friendships is evident on popular blog hosting sites such as Xanga.com, which is favoured by East

Coast bloggers and LiveJournal.com where West Coasters congregate. Those who have amalgamated the real and virtual worlds have essentially embraced blogging as part of their lives. Their blogs are perfect reflections of this synergy: online journals with entries of their innermost thoughts interleaved by pictorial entries that record social outings with friends of both the digital and traditional variety.

With digitized people reading their deepest thoughts and literally jumping out of the monitor to meet them, a blogger's life becomes much more open and their social circle rapidly expands. While some bloggers prefer to keep a shell of anonymity, others don't mind blurring the real and virtual; they simply view it as a way to make friends with people who may understand them better than those they come in contact with in the traditional manner. Blogging is a lifestyle some people may not be able to fathom. But if you're curious about the phenomenon of weblogging, you can always ask a blogger to explain it to you by leaving a comment on their site. They'd love to have you drop by.

TERRY CHAN is an avid reader and writer of blogs.

BLOGGING, AN INTRODUCTION BY KUAN FOO

A blog, in its simplest form, is a website containing a series of dated entries maintained over a period of time. The first "weblogs" (so named by John Barger in 1997) appeared in the late 1990s and were essentially link driven: weblog editors would compile links to other websites or interesting news stories, adding their own personal comments and thoughts, in effect pre-surfing the Net for their readers. Over time, as weblogging technology became more accessible to the non-programmers, blogging came to encompass everything from political commentary to online personal memoirs. Today, among the hundreds of thousands of blogs online, you will find media critiques, topic-oriented discussions, celebrity diaries, travel journals, family newsletters — almost as many forms as there are writers. Here is a small sample of some of my favourite sites:

LITERARY

Neil Gaiman
http://www.neilgaiman.com/journal/journal.asp

William Gibson
http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/archive/archive.asp

CELEBRITY

Wil Wheaton dot Net
http://www.wilwheaton.net/

POLITICAL COMMENTARY

Warren Kinsella
http://www.warrenkinsella.com/musings.htm

Talking Points Memo
http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/

ASIAN-AMERICAN

Angry Asian Man
http://www.angryasianman.com/angry.html

Min Jung Kim
http://www.minjungkim.com/

stuff

HOLY MATRIMONY!

By Marlene Dong

KUAN DO

I have too many friends.

Normally, this wouldn't be a problem. My social calendar sees more action than a John Woo film, and I'm never afraid to attend an event on my own because I usually run into someone I know. If I need support for a charity event, I have friends who will rise to the occasion. In fact, nearly every one of my writing contracts has come from a friend's referral. So what exactly is the problem?

25.

That's how many weddings I've attended in the last five years. Interpret that stat any way you like, but having friends who are demographically ripe for marriage means I won't be losing any through attrition.

It's also a ridiculous amount of abalone, lobster, shark's fin soup and honeymoon fried rice to consume, some of which I can't eat because I'm allergic to shellfish. This usually means for three of the twelve courses of a Chinese wedding banquet, I feel a little like King Midas: salivating and gazing hungrily at those feasting around me.

Each year, I vow to lose a few friends — for poverty's sake. Most people have a rainy day fund; I have a "wedding fund". That wedding fund quickly becomes a "housewarming fund". Then just when I think I've accumulated more than pocket lint, enter the "baby fund". No wonder my annual RRSP contributions are never maxed.

Wedding gifts are the biggest financial drain. Vancouver is frighteningly microcosmic and because one couple is bound to know another, I can't exactly "Buy 2 Woks, Get 1 Free" and be done with it.

Ditto for my wardrobe: Outfit #1, which I wore for Wedding #3, couldn't be worn for Wedding #4 because both occurred in the same year. And I couldn't wear Outfit #2 from Wedding #11 to Wedding #17 because they had more than a few guests in common. And I definitely can't wear Outfit #5 again because I've seen the photos from Wedding #22 and I look like a linebacker.

As a veteran wedding guest I've heard countless lousy speeches, tasted disgusting cakes, witnessed a catfight in the ladies' washroom, and seen centerpieces disappear into coat pockets and purses. I've developed some pretty toned biceps from clanging chopsticks to plate. And despite my best efforts to time my bowel movements, I've been dragged out of the bathroom for the bouquet toss 25 times. So far, I've managed to position myself out of contention. I don't count the time I was nailed in the head by one bride's fastball pitch.

Still, at least as a wedding guest I can sit, eat and then join the stampede for the door when oranges arrive at the table. When I'm asked to help behind the scenes, forget the three square meals and chance to rest my Franco Sartoed feet. I've played bathroom monitor to 100 guests at a church with only two toilets. I've scrabbled over a grassy field to pick up confetti by hand. One guest even swore at me in Chinese after I asked him to turn off his cell phone. I promptly swore back in French.

I've seen it all. Brides who are control freaks, prima donnas or basket cases. Attendants who are selfish, demanding or lazy. Fortunately, grooms tend to be mellower, although some are frighteningly passionate about pew decorations, but add parents into the wedding mix and you have yourself a homemade Molotov cocktail.

I promptly swore back in French...

I've seen family relations become permanently strained because of a wedding. I've seen couples succumb to the pressures of planning, and friendships shattered because the bride took the "maid" in "maid of honour" too literally. Time and time again, I wonder why so many couples subject themselves to premature hair loss and a 10-year debt repayment plan. Wedding industry machinations and cultural traditions aside, it seems like a high price to pay for an exchange of "I do's".

But then I remember the last wedding I attended. I was "stage managing" the events for the day and had seen all the last minute mayhem prior to the bride's walk down the aisle. As I collapsed into a nearby pew and schemed to get rid of five friends before next summer, I had an epiphany.

The bride and groom stood at the altar framed on either side by attendants and groomsmen. The flower planters were perfectly positioned. The feather pen I'd searched the entire city for was poised and ready for the signing of the registry. The guests were balanced on either side of the aisle and babies gurgled quietly. Everything was just how the bride and groom wanted.

As the minister opened the ceremony, the groom smiled and gave the bride's hands a reassuring squeeze. The tension promptly melted from the bride's face and for one moment, all the craziness of the past 12 months seemed worth it and I was happy to be a part of a friend's special day.

Then a cell phone rang.

MARLENE DONG is a Vancouver writer and editor who is grateful she doesn't live in The Maldives, where there are 19.7 marriages per 1,000 people, making it the country with the highest marriage rate in the world.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

By Emmanuel Yip

When I was eight years old, my parents forced me to attend Chinese school. It was an experience that I will never forget. For five days each week, after regular school hours were done, I still had to attend additional classes. I missed hanging out with my friends: the laughs, the misguided pranks and the bonding. Every night, I had to contend with two sets of homework: one in English and one in Chinese. Admittedly, the English homework was relatively simple (unless I was feeling lazy). The Chinese homework, on the other hand, required the ability to read and write Chinese, a skill I was somewhat lacking at the time. It was a struggle trying to learn all those characters, in all their different forms, with strokes all over the place. Even more difficult at my age was adjusting to a class with people of varying ages and abilities. Some students were extremely keen, always on the ball and impressing others with their Chinese skills. I was in the category of "get me the hell out of here or else I'm skipping." I hated Chinese school.

Still, I persisted and eventually learned how to write my name and read some characters — enough to read signs in Chinatown, anyway. But, for the most part, I was a bad student, always procrastinating and never prepared for the oral and written exams. And although I somehow managed to pass, I resented my parents for forcing me to attend. They constantly bombarded me with adult slogans — "build your foundation," "know your own language," and most importantly, "respect and cherish your heritage" — but it all fell on deaf ears. Eventually, when I reached grade eight and obtained some degree of choice in the matter, I quit Chinese school after six long and gruelling years.

Now that I am much older, I thank my parents for their foresight. Through language, communication is possible and relationships are enhanced. Looking back, I realize, no matter how much you resist, you still take something away: attendance is the key, regardless of effort, intelligence or, in my case, interest. Now I can converse freely in Chinese, without any hesitation or embarrassment. I can't say that about my friends who didn't attend Chinese school; they lack the ability or the confidence to speak Chinese in public and only use English. I, on the other hand, I use Chinese in as much as possible: in restaurants, at the market, with other speakers. I still need practice, as my writing is weak, however I can speak relatively well, without a Canadian accent. Only in hindsight have I realized the importance of knowing another language, especially the language that my parents use. As I grow older, I will strive to learn more, surprising both myself and others around me who think I don't look the part. The foundation has been built and the walls are strong.

EMMANUEL YIP is a teacher.

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We're looking for people who can write informative articles on Asian-Canadian culture and entertainment. Music, movie and DVD reviews are welcome too, as long as they're knowledgeable and well-informed.

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We also offer full-page ads and design services to desirable parties. Email us at the address above and we'll talk!

Thanks for reading!

See how happy this guy is? This can be you!